

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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FM AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6904

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AMEMBASSY CAIRO IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

USMISSION GENEVA

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMCONSUL LENINGRAD

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

USMISSION USUN

C O N F I D E N T I A L MOSCOW 1576

E.O. 11652 GDS

TAGS: PFOR, EG, UR, XF, SY

SUBJECT: GROMYKO'S VISIT TO DAMASCUS

REF: A. MOSCOW 19191 B. MOSCOW 1489 C. DAMASCUS 395

GENEVA FOR MEPC DEL

1. SUMMARY. PUBLISHED RESULTS OF GROMYKO'S DAMASCUS VISIT
INDICATE THAT HE USED TALKS WITH THE SYRIANS PRIMARILY TO
STRENGTHEN THE SOVIET HAND IN PREPARATION FOR THE PRESENT SOVIET-
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EGYPTIAN NEGOTIATIONS IN CAIRO. SOVIET-SYRIAN JOINT STATEMENT

(PRAVDA, FEBRUARY 4) CONTAINS SPECIFIC ENDORSEMENT FOR RECONVENING THE GENEVA CONFERENCE "QUICKLY, IN ANY CASE NOT LATER THAN FEBRUARY OR THE BEGINNING OF MARCH." HOWEVER, AT THE SAME TIME IT SCRUPULOUSLY AVOIDS ANY CRITICAL REFERENCE TO DISENGAGEMENT OR PARTIAL STEPS WHICH FIGURED PROMINENTLY IN EARLIER SOVIET-SYRIAN DOCUMENTS. ON OTHER TOPICS THE STATEMENT LARGELY REPLAYS APPROPRIATE ELEMENTS FROM THE SOVIET-SYRIAN STATEMENT LAST APRIL AND FROM SOVIET POINT OF VIEW APPEARS TO BREAK NO IMPORTANT NEW GROUND. END SUMMARY.

2. GENEVA CONFERENCE. SOVIET-SYRIAN STATEMENT CONTAINS SPECIFIC JOINT CALL FOR THE RENEWAL OF THE MEPC "QUICKLY, IN ANY CASE NOT LATER THAN FEBRUARY OR THE BEGINNING OF MARCH OF THIS YEAR." REFERENCE TO SPECIFIC DATES FOR RECONVENING THE GENEVA CONFERENCE IS A FIRST. PREVIOUS SOVIET DOCUMENTS HAVE USED LESS PRECISE FORMULAS CALLING FOR RENEWAL OF GENEVA "AS SOON AS POSSIBLE" OR IN THE "NEAREST FUTURE". LANGUAGE CONCERNING INCUSION OF ALL INTERESTED PARTIES IN A RECONVENED MEPC IS NEW TO SOVIET-SYRIAN STATEMENTS BUT IS ESSENTIALLY IDENTICAL WITH THAT USED IN THE JOINT SOVIET-EGYPTIAN COMMUNIQUE ISSUED FOLLOWING FAHMY'S VISIT HERE IN DECEMBER (REF A). ABOVE STATEMENT ALONG WITH REFERENCE TO THE IMPORTANCE OF ARAB UNITY FOR A MIDDLE EAST SETTLEMENT WHICH MUST "ENCOMPASS ALL PARTIES INVOLVED IN THE CONFLICT" OUTWARDLY APPEARS TO HAVE STRENGTHENED GROMYKO' HAND IN CONFRONTING THE PROBLEM OF SOVIET-EGYPTIAN DIFFERENCES OVER THE GENEVA CONFERENCE.

3. DISENGAGEMENT. PRESENT STATEMENT MAKES NO REFERENCE TO DISENGAGEMENT AGREEMENTS AS ONLY FIRST STAGE OR TO "PARTIAL STEPS" TOWARD AN ME SETTLEMENT. PREVIOUS SOVIET-SYRIAN COMMUNIQUE CONTAINED EXPLICIT AND FORCEFUL ASSERTIONS CRITICAL OF "PARTIAL MEASURES". IN SEPTEMBER 1974 BREZHNEV AND ASAD REAFFIRMED THAT DISENGAGEMENT CONSTITUTED "ONLY A BEGINNING STAGE, A FIRST STEP" TOWARD A MIDDLE EAST SETTLEMENT. THE SOVIETS EXPRESSED AN IDENTICAL POSITION IN BREZHNEV'S MESSAGE TO ASAD FOLLOWING THE SYRIAN-ISRAELI DISENGAGEMENT AGREEMENT IN MAY. ABSENCE OF THIS ELEMENT FROM THE PRESENT SOVIET-SYRIAN STATEMENT--GIVEN THE SECRETARY'S IMPENDING TRIP TO THE MIDDLE EAST AND SPECULATION ABOUT POSSIBILITIES FOR SOME NEW AGREEMENT ON THE SEPARATION OF FORCES--SUGGEST THAT PARTIES CONSCIOUSLY CHOSE TO MAINTAIN FLEXIBILITY ABOUT ANY NEW ISRAELI-ARAB DISENGAGEMENT AGREEMENTS. CONFIDENTIAL

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4. MIDDLE EAST SITUATION. ON OTHER MIDDLE EAST TOPICS THE STATEMENT APPEARS TO BREAK NO SIGNIFICANT NEW GROUND. MIDDLE EAST SITUATION IS CHARACTERIZED AS TENSE, AND ISRAEL IS BLAMED FOR PERPETUATION OF THIS CONDITION. TERMS FOR A MIDDLE EAST SETTLEMENT REFLECT STANDARD SOVIET FORMULAS CALLING FOR "WITHDRAWAL OF ISRAELI FORCES FROM ALL OCCUPIED ARAB TERRITORIES AND SECURING THE NATIONAL RIGHTS OF THE ARAB PEOPLE OF PALESTINE." HOWEVER

THE STATEMENT INTERESTINGLY DOES NOT MENTION PALESTINE "STATE" AS DID GROMYKO IN HIS SPEECH JANUARY 2 (REF B). IT ALSO FAILS TO DEFINE PALESTINIAN RIGHTS (E.G., THE RIGHT TO SELF-DETERMINATION AND STATEHOOD). SYRIANS UNILATERALLY AFFIRMED THE IMPORTANCE OF SOVIET PARTICIPATION AT ALL STAGES AND IN ALL AREAS OF A MIDDLE EAST SETTLEMENT. PREVIOUSLY THIS WAS CAST AS A JOINT POSITION. REFERENCE TO THE IMPORTANCE OF SYRAIN MILITARY CAPABILITY AND SYRIA'S RIGHT TO EMPLOY ALL EFFECTIVE MEANS FOR THE LIBERATION OF ITS OCCUPIED LANDS REPEATS LANGUAGE USED IN SOVIET-SYRIAN STATEMENT LAST APRIL.

5. COMMENT: OUTWARDLY, AT LEAST, ALL THIS APPEARS TO INDICATE THAT GROMYKO MADE HEADWAY IN DAMASCUS TOWARD INCREASING THE PRESSURE ON EGYPT TO COME AROUND ON GENEVA. THE SPECIFIC DATING OF GENEVA IS PROBABLY AT LEAST AS USEFUL FOR THE SOVIETS AS FOR THE SYRIANS, SINCE IT INCREASES GROMYKO'S NEGOTIATING STRENGTH WITH THE EGYPTIANS ON THIS IMPORTANT QUESTION. AT THE SAME TIME, HOWEVER, THE SOVIETS APPEAR TO HAVE LEFT THEMSELVES ROOM TO MANEUVER REGARDING EGYPTIAN INTERESTS IN PURSUING NEGOTIATIONS WITH ISRAEL ON A NEW LIMITED DISENGAGEMENT.

6. INCIDENTALLY WE HAVE LEARNED THAT IN ADDITION TO M.D. SYTENKO, CHIEF OF MFA'S NEAR EAST DIVISION, GROMYKO IS ALSO ACCOMPANIED BY G.M. KORNIYENKO, CHIEF OF THE MFA'S USA DIVISION. WE ALSO UNDERSTAND THAT GROMYKO'S PARTY NUMBERS ABOUT TWENTY AND HAVE BEEN TOLD BY FRENCH THAT AT LEAST TWO OF THE PARTY ARE FROM THE MILITARY.

7. WE FIND OURSELVES IN SUBSTANTIAL AGREEMENT WITH REFTTEL C, WHICH WE HAVE JUST SEEN.
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